

Organ restoration means cleaner sound

By Mark Baus
Sentinel staff writer

Bits and pieces of history are constantly popping up in Woodstock to remind us of our past.

Members of the Congregational Universalist Church are reliving a bit of history through the restoration of their 78-year-old church organ.

The organ, built along with the church in 1907, is being restored and modified for the first time since 1940, Rev. Steve Washburn said.

The congregation's music committee, chaired by Paul Lipsitz with
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Sentinel photo by Scott J. Brooks

Ronald Damholt and Walter Bradford, of Prairie Organ Co., Evanston, check a pipe on the 78-year-old organ at the Congregational Universalist Church of Woodstock. The organ was built into the church in 1907.

Ball

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"It, again, is to defray costs on some of the Christmas lights, carriage rides, and other Christmas activities available in the square through the chamber," Chamber of Commerce member Melodee Ladd said Wednesday.

Black tie is optional. Singer Mary Zaranto and a jazz quartet will provide musical entertainment.

Cocktails will be served in the gallery from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. Dinner will then be served in the courtroom, with music and dancing following at 9:30 p.m.

"We're working on getting valet parking, but at this point we are still working on that," Ladd said.

Decorations will be donated for the ball.

"The courthouse will do its usual decorations and others will be supplied by Apple Creek Flowers and Busse-Thomas Flowers. They'll both help supply everything we need to help dress it up," Ladd said.

Tickets for the ball are available at the Tree of Life (owner Nancy May sold the first ticket), Beard & Stovall, Wood N Things, Paperfunalia, and the chamber office.

"It's only a week from Saturday. That's why it's kind of pressing to get as many (tickets) sold as we possibly can," Ladd said.

She hopes to crown the king of the Christmas activities at the ball. He'll lead the annual Christmas parade around the square the next day, Sunday, Dec. 1.

Organ

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organist Donald Beyer, organized the congregation and sponsored several fund-raisers to finance the restoration. They hired the Prairie Organ Company of Evanston to oversee the work.

"We hired them because they had done restoration work before and they were interested in involving the congregation in the process," Washburn said. In August, church members helped out in the first task of cleaning the large organ pipes. "It was kind of like a big jigsaw puzzle," Washburn said of washing and re-assembling the pipes.

The primary difference in the organ's sound, he said, will be the replacement of the aeline rank -- or "stops" -- of the organ with flute stops. "The aeline sounds were something the people could appreciate when the organ was first built. It's a mellow, quiet sound. But today, with all the background noise from traffic and other things, the congregation can't even hear those sounds," Washburn explained.

"It really makes you understand how much more noise we actually live with today."

The new flute stops will not only brighten the sound of the organ, he said, but will allow them to broaden the range of music they will be able to play.

"In the last three quarters of the 19th century and the first third of the

20th century, romantic music, with is dark, emotional sounds, was popular. But if you go back and look at the number of pieces written for organ, about one-third are romantic and two-thirds are either baroque, classical or modern, which calls for that bright sound," he said.

The organ's large bellows was originally hand-pumped. In the 1920s, Washburn said, an air compressor was added to replace the human power. "There are people in the congregation who still remember people pumping the bellows by hand," he said.

When the organ was disassembled, church members found items dating back to the 1940s when it was last cleaned. "We found a tungsten casing for an old light bulb and things like that. We decided it would be a good idea for us to leave something with a purpose inside the organ," Washburn said.

Wednesday, when the organ was finally resealed, members of the congregation placed a scroll inside containing messages from the congregation.

The newly-restored organ will make its debut Sunday. "With just the pipes being cleaned, we've already noticed the organ's sound is much cleaner," Washburn said. And so it will be, for the next 50 years or so.

Robbers

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from the owner-bartender, Mike

Under Sheriff George Hendle said